

Alexander of Lycopolis against the Manichaean conception of matter

Jan Opsomer (Leuven)

- T 1 He laid down as principles God and matter, God being good and matter evil, the measure of God's goodness far surpassing that of the evilness of matter. (trans. Van der Horst - Mansfeld)
ἀρχὰς ἐτίθετο θεὸν καὶ ὕλην, εἶναι δὲ τὸν μὲν θεὸν ἀγαθόν, τὴν δὲ ὕλην κακόν· ἀγαθῷ δὲ πλείονι τὸν θεὸν ὑπερβάλλειν ἢ κακῷ τὴν ὕλην. (4.24-5.3 Brinkmann)
- T 2 So he sent a certain power, which we call Soul, towards matter, which was to mingle with it throughout.
πέμψαι οὖν τινα δύναμιν, τὴν ὑφ' ἡμῶν καλουμένην ψυχὴν, ἐπὶ τὴν ὕλην, ἥτις αὐτῇ διὰ πάσης μιχθήσεται. (5.21-22)
- T 3 Then God was filled with pity for Soul's plight and sent another power which we call Demiurge. When this power had arrived and had put its hand to creating the universe [...].
οἰκτεῖραι οὖν τοῦτο τὸν θεὸν καὶ πέμψαι τινὰ ἐτέραν δύναμιν, ἣν ἡμεῖς καλοῦμεν δημιουργόν. ἥς δὲ ἀφικομένης καὶ τῇ κοσμοποιίᾳ ἐπιχειρηκυίας κτλ. (6.6-9)
- T 4 For, apart from the Demiurge, there is another power which, having descended towards the luminosity of the sun, fulfils this task.
ἐπὶ γάρ τοι τῷ δημιουργῷ ἐτέραν δύναμιν ἐπὶ τὸ φωτοειδὲς τοῦ ἡλίου κατελθοῦσαν ταῦτα διαπραγματεύσασθαι, (6.22-24)
- T 5 He does not speak of matter in Plato's sense, which would mean defining it as that which becomes all things when it assumes quality and shape, — which is why Plato calls it “all-receiving” and “mother” and “nurse”, — nor in Aristotle's sense, namely as the element in relation to which form and privation occur. He means something entirely different, for it is the random motion within each individual thing which he calls matter.
τὴν δὲ ὕλην λέγει οὐχ ἣν Πλάτων, τὴν πάντα γινομένην ὅταν λάβῃ ποιότητα καὶ σχῆμα — διὸ πανδεχὴ καὶ μητέρα καὶ τιθήνην καλεῖ καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης, τὸ στοιχεῖον περὶ ὃ τὸ εἶδος καὶ ἡ στέρησις, ἀλλ' ἕτερόν τι παρὰ ταῦτα· τὴν γὰρ ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων ἄτακτον κίνησιν, ταύτην ὕλην καλεῖ (5.3-8)
- T 6 But this is exactly what we said to be the property of matter, viz., that it is nothing in itself and receives the shapes and the qualities, and in this way becomes all the things which are determinate.
τοῦτο δὲ ἦν ὃ ἐλέγομεν ἴδιον τῆς ὕλης εἶναι, τὸ μηδὲν τι οὔσαν καθ' ἑαυτὴν δεχομένην δὲ τὰ σχήματα καὶ τὰς ποιότητας πάντα γίνεσθαι τὰ διωρισμένα. (28.7-10)
- T 7 For matter in itself and taken absolutely is neither body nor something definitely incorporeal nor just a concrete thing, but it is something indefinite, and it becomes definite upon the reception of form; for example, when it receives the form of the pyramid it becomes fire, when that of the octaedron, air, when that of the icosaedron, water, when that of the cube, earth.

ὅλως γὰρ καθ' αὐτὴν μὲν ἡ ὕλη οὔτε σῶμά ἐστιν οὔτε ἀκριβῶς ἀσώματόν τι οὔτε ἀπλῶς τόδε τι, ἀλλ' ἀόριστός τις προσλαβοῦσα τὸ εἶδος γίνεται ὠρισμένη, οἷον τὴν πυραμίδα μὲν πῦρ, τὸ ὀκτάεδρον δὲ ἀήρ, τὸ εἰκοσάεδρον δὲ ὕδωρ, κύβον δὲ γῆ. (10.19-23)

T 8 [...] the matter assumed by those who have their wits about them, i.e. the matter which reason finds to be either absolutely non-existent or that which comes last in the scale of being and which can only with difficulty be grasped by some sort of bastard concept.

τὴν ὑπειλημμένην παρὰ τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσιν, ἣν ἢ μὴ παντάπασιν οὔσαν ὁ λόγος εὕρισκει ἢ τὸ πάντων ἔσχατον καὶ μόγις εἰς ἔννοιαν νόθον ἀφικνεῖσθαι δυνάμενον.

T 9 He [= Mani] posits two principles, God and matter. If he does so in order to distinguish between being and becoming, his assumption is less mistaken. For in that case, neither would matter form itself, and so avoid the contradiction of being both active and passible, nor would similar contradictions - which it is perhaps illegitimate even to mention — be attributable to the productive cause, although it should not be forgotten that God is wholly independent of matter as to his works, since in relation to that Intellect all things are capable of coming into being hypostatically. (trans. Van der Horst - Mansfeld, modified)

Δύο ἀρχὰς ὑποτίθεται, θεὸν καὶ ὕλην. εἰ μὲν τὸ γιγνόμενον τοῦ ὄντος ἀποχωρίζων, οὐχ ὁμοίως φαύλη ἢ ὑπόθεσις, ἵνα μήτε ἡ ὕλη ἑαυτὴν ποιῇ καὶ τὸν τῶν ἐναντίων ἀποδέχεται λόγον, ποιουσά τε καὶ πάσχουσα, μήτ' αὖ τοιαῦτα πάλιν ἕτερα περὶ τὸ ποιητικὸν αἴτιον θεωρῆται, ἃ οὐδὲ λέγειν ἴσως θέμις — καίτοι οὐ δεομένου τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὰ ἀποτελέσματα ὕλης, ἐν ὑποστάσει δυναμένων γίγνεσθαι πάντων πρὸς ἐκεῖνον τὸν νοῦν. (9.17-10.4)

T 10 I find it hard to believe that neither Mani nor his followers paid any attention to the fact that, if God created this power of his own free will – as in the true doctrine those entities which come next in order, while God remains, are said to be hypostases – absolutely nothing would keep him from becoming the cause of all the other things which come into being as well, without being dependent on any pre-existing matter in any way.

εἰ δὲ ἐποίησεν αὐτὴν καὶ ὕλης ἁμοιρός ἐστιν, θαυμάζω πῶς οὐκ ἐσκόπησαν οὔτε οὗτος οὔτε οἱ ἀπ' ἐκείνου, ὅτι εἰ — ὃ λέγεται κατὰ τὴν ἀληθῆ δόξαν ὅτι τὰ ἐφεξῆς μένοντος τοῦ θεοῦ ὑποστάσεις εἰσὶν — τὴν δύναμιν ταύτην ἐποίησεν βουληθεὶς ὁ θεός, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων τῶν γενομένων αἴτιος ἐγένετο οὐδὲν ὕλης προϋπαρχούσης προσδεηθεὶς (24.16-23)

T 11 If, on the other hand – as seems to be his real meaning – matter is the random motion inherent in things two remarks must be made. First, that he seems to be ignorant of the fact that he attributes reality to another productive principle as well, though it be only the cause of evil. Second, that he does not seem to observe what is entailed by his assumption, viz., that if both God and matter have to be assumed as being absolutely real, another matter will come into being for God, in order that each productive principle be provided with an underlying matter of its own. In that case, however, he will stand convicted in our eyes of having introduced four principles instead of two.

εἰ δέ, ὅπερ μᾶλλον λέγεσθαι δοκεῖ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, ἡ ἄτακτος κίνησις τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν <ἡ> ὕλη, πρῶτον μὲν λαμβάνει ἑαυτὸν ἕτερον ποιητικὸν αἴτιον ὑφιστάμενος, κακοποιὸν μέντοι, οὐχ ὁρᾷ δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐπόμενον, ὅτι εἰ θεὸν πάντως ὑποστατέον καὶ ὕλην, ἑτέρα τις ὕλη τῷ θεῷ ὑποστήσεται, ἵνα ἑκατέρῳ τῶν ποιητικῶν αἰτίων ἡ ὑποκειμένη ὑπάρχη ὕλη. ἀντὶ τοίνυν δύο τέτταρας ἡμῖν ποιῶν ἀρχὰς ἐπιδειχθήσεται. (10.4-11)

T 12 The corollary to this division is equally amazing. For if God, in his view, amounts to what is good, and if he wishes to assume God's opposite as real, why then does he refrain from

opposing to him what is evil in the same manner as certain Pythagoreans have done? For certainly this Pythagorean theory is easier to accept; the Pythagoreans speak of two principles, good and evil, which are continually at war, while the good prevails, since all things must perish if evil were to gain the upper hand.

θαυμαστή δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀντιδιαίρεσις. εἰ γὰρ θεὸς ἐστὶν παρ' αὐτῷ ὅπερ τὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ βούλεται ὑφίστασθαι αὐτῷ ἐναντίον, διὰ τί οὐ καθάπερ τινὲς τῶν Πυθαγορείων τὸ κακὸν αὐτῷ ἀντιτίθουσιν; ἀνεκτότερον γοῦν ὑπ' ἐκείνων λέγεται δύο εἶναι ἀρχάς, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ κακόν, στασιάζειν δὲ ταύτας συνεχῶς, ἐπικρατεῖν δὲ τὸ ἀγαθόν· εἰ γὰρ τὸ κακὸν ὑπερέχει, φθαρήσεσθαι πάντα. (10.12-19)

T 13 Alex. Lyc. (from T 7): ὅλως γὰρ καθ' αὐτὴν μὲν ἡ ὕλη οὔτε σῶμά ἐστιν οὔτε ἀκριβῶς ἀσώματόν τι οὔτε ἀπλῶς τόδε τι, ἀλλ' ἀόριστός τις προσλαβοῦσα τὸ εἶδος γίνεται ὠρισμένη

T 14 Porph. *Sent.* 2: Things in themselves incorporeal, precisely in virtue of the fact that they are superior to all place, are everywhere, not in extension, but partlessly. (trans. J. Dillon)
Τὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ἀσώματα, αὐτῷ ᾧ κρείττονα παντός ἐστι τόπου, πανταχῇ ἐστὶν, οὐ διαστατῶς, ἀλλ' ἀμερῶς.

Sent. 4: Things in themselves incorporeal are not present to bodies and do not mix with them in their reality and their essence, but rather in virtue of a reality generated by their inclination they impart a power which acts immediately upon bodies. For the inclination generates a secondary power which acts immediately upon bodies.

Τὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ἀσώματα ὑποστάσει μὲν καὶ οὐσίᾳ οὐ πάρεστιν οὐδὲ συγκίρνεται τοῖς σώμασι, τῇ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ῥοπῆς ὑποστάσει τινὸς δυνάμεως μεταδίδωσι προσεχοῦς τοῖς σώμασιν. ἡ γὰρ ῥοπή δευτέραν τινὰ δύνανται ὑπέστησε προσεχῇ τοῖς σώμασιν.

T 15 Alc. *Did.* 163.7-8: τοιαύτη δ' οὐσα οὔτε σῶμα ἂν εἴη οὔτε ἀσώματον. Apul. *De Plat.* 1.5, §192: *sed neque corpoream nec sane incorpoream concedit esse*; Tertull. *Adv. Herm.* 54.19-20; Calc. *in Tim.* 314.18: *neque corpus neque incorporeum quiddam posse dici simpliciter puto*. Also Arius Did. ap. Stob. 1.11.4 = *Epit. phys.* Fr. 2, DG 448 (presented as Aristotelian doctrine, but mixed up with Platonic metaphors).

T 16 Are God and matter (1) wholly incorporeal, or (2) is the one corporeal, the other incorporeal, or (3) are both corporeal?

<ad 1> For if each is incorporeal, neither can be in the other – except perhaps in the manner of grammatical knowledge being in the soul. But in regard to God and matter such a conception is absurd. Or is the one within the other as in a void, just as some people hold the void to surround the universe? Then the other principle is without reality, for the essence of the void is nothingness. Perhaps in the manner of attributes? Our first objection is that this is impossible, for they cannot, when bereft of substance, be anywhere, since substance is a kind of vehicle supporting the attributes. <ad 3> If each is a body, then of necessity they are both heavy or both light or both intermediate between heavy and light, or one of them is heavy or one of them is light or one of them is intermediate. If, then, they are both heavy, they will of necessity be compacted, and the same holds good also when they are both light and both intermediate. If, on the other hand, they differ from one another, the one will be absolutely separated from the other. For there is one place for what is heavy and another for what is intermediate and another for what is light: up for what is light, down for what is heavy, and for the other what is between top and bottom. The bottom of each sphere is at its centre, for from the centre towards the whole superior region up till the upper surface the distance is the same everywhere. And, again, all heavy objects from all directions fly towards the central place. Which is why I could not suppress a grin when I heard that matter moving in its random way – for that is what would be natural for matter – arrived at the region of God, which is the light and the brilliant and so on. <ad 2> If the one is a body and the other incorporeal, then, first, only that which is body will be movable; next, if they are unmingled, each will be separate according to its own nature; but if the one is mingled with the other, it should be either soul or intellect or attribute. For it is only in this way that incorporeals are allowed to mingle with bodies.

(1) Πότερον δὲ ὅλως ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἡ ὕλη ἀσώματα, (2) ἢ τὸ μὲν σῶμα τὸ δὲ ἀσώματον, (3) ἢ ἄμφω σώματα; (**ad 1**) εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἀσώματα ἐκάτερα, οὐδέτερον ἐν οὐδετέρῳ· πλήν εἰ μὴ ὡς γραμματικῇ ἐν ψυχῇ — τοῦτο δὲ ἄτοπον ἐπὶ θεοῦ καὶ ὕλης ἐπινοεῖν — εἴτε ὡς ἐν κενῷ, ὡς τινες λέγουσιν τὸ κενὸν τῷ παντὶ περικεχύσθαι, τὸ ἕτερον πάλιν ἀνυπόστατον, οὐσία γὰρ τοῦ κενοῦ τὸ μηδέν· εἰ δὲ ὡς συμβεβηκότα, πρῶτον μὲν ἀδύνατον τοῦτο, οὐσίας γὰρ ἅμοιρα ὄντα οὐδαμοῦ εἶναι δύναται, ὅχημα γὰρ ὥσπερ ἐστὶν ὑποβεβλημένον τοῖς συμβεβηκόσιν ἢ οὐσία. (**ad 3**) εἰ δὲ σώματα ἐκάτερα, ἀνάγκη ἢ ἄμφω βαρέα εἶναι ἢ ἄμφω κοῦφα ἢ μέσα, ἢ τὸ μὲν βαρὺ ἢ τὸ δὲ κοῦφον ἢ τὸ δὲ μέσον. εἴτε οὖν ἐκάτερα βαρέα, σὺν πάσῃ οὕτω γε ἀνάγκη εἶναι, τὰ δὲ αὐτὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κοῦφων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν μέσων· εἴτε παραλλάττειτο, τὸ ἕτερον πάντως τοῦ ἑτέρου ἔσται κεχωρισμένον. ἄλλος γὰρ τῷ βαρεῖ καὶ ἄλλος τῷ μέσῳ καὶ τῷ κοῦφῳ τόπος, τῷ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἄνω τῷ δὲ τὸ κάτω τῷ δὲ τὸ μέσον. παντὸς δὲ σφαιροειδοῦς τὸ κάτω μέσον ἐστίν, ἀπὸ γὰρ αὐτοῦ πρὸς πᾶν τὸ μετέωρον ἄχρι τῆς ἄνω ἐπιφανείας πάντοθεν ἐστὶν ἢ ἀπόστασις ἴση· καὶ πάντα πάλιν τὰ βαρέα πανταχόθεν φέρεται ἐπ’ αὐτά· διὸ καὶ γέλωτός μοι ἐπῆλθεν ἀκούσαντι ὅτι κινουμένη ἡ ὕλη ἀτάκτως — τοῦτο γὰρ αὐτῇ κατὰ φύσιν — εἰς τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀφίκετο χώραν, ἣ ἐστὶ φῶς καὶ λαμπρὸν καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα. (**ad 2**) εἰ δὲ τὸ μὲν σῶμα τὸ δὲ ἀσώματον, πρῶτον μὲν ὁ ἐστὶν σῶμα μόνον κινήτῳ ἐστίν· ἔπειτα δὲ εἰ μὲν ἄμικτά ἐστίν, χωρὶς ἐκάτερον κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν, εἰ δὲ μέμικται τὸ ἕτερον τῷ ἑτέρῳ, ἢ ψυχῇ ἢ νοῦς ἢ συμβεβηκὸς ἂν εἴη· οὕτω γὰρ μόνον τὰ ἀσώματα τοῖς σώμασι πάρεστι μίγνυσθαι. (13.10-14.17)